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INTRODUCTION

Advertising, Marketing, Public Relations and contemporary News: in these potentially powerful forms of cultural communication whose voices do we hear and which of these voices command most attention? This special edition of the *Journal of Promotional Communication* offers some tentative answers to these important societal questions.

Thus in this issue the subject of voice and both its re-presentation and representation are addressed and rightly afforded critical importance within the realms of media communication and culture. As Couldry (2010) argues, voice is fundamental as a process by which individuals can give their accounts, but vitally, he also refers to the idea of voice as a value too. That is to say we can understand much about broader societal values through nuanced appreciations of types of voices heard and the levels of being heard. In this special issue we are most interested and concerned with the voices we do not hear and those we hear framed in a manner that reduces their authority.

Typically, in public and promotional discourse, there is a reliance on 'official voices' to define both the issues and how individuals are perceived (Watts 2001). Certain voices are heard most loudly thus, even if unintentionally, many other voices are marginalized. As Mitra and Watts (2002) point out "A speaker can be endowed with voice as a function of a public hearing/reading" (p. 483). Although they were using the concept of voice as a lens on cyberspace and the Internet, their point is also useful in the context of promotional communications and political journalism because in both cases they enable a voice to be heard/read - both in and by traditional and newer social media. This is vital because if voice is critical in establishing a sense of self and of others, denial of it impacts the essence of what it is to be human.

This special issue includes some of the most thoughtful work by students in the corporate and marketing communication department of the Faculty of Media & Communications at Bournemouth University on two final year optional units - Social Communications and Political Journalism - and explores the societal impact and implications of our promotional culture and representations of political issues in our news media. What you'll find in this issue are argument essays by the Social Communications students and shorter empirical studies by Political Journalism

students. What they have in common is an attempt to address the issue of voice and, more to the point, the notion of inequality of voice.

The issue begins with expertise and expert voices. Alison Smith's paper explores the use of expertise in news about UK drug policy reform and identifies who speaks on the issue of UK drug enforcement, including what official sources are used to help define the parameters of this debate. It draws on and contributes to scholarship around the use of experts and official sources in the news and suggests that in debates about evidence-based drug policy that political sources are prioritised in the news over scientists and academics that would bring that evidence to the policy discussions and debates. Thus it becomes clear that not even all 'official sources' voices are treated equally. We then turn to Shauna Mahoney's paper on the silencing of lung cancer patients in public health and charity anti-smoking and lung cancer campaigns. In it she makes a powerful argument about the power of an amalgamation of mainstream voices and their (un)intended consequences for other - in this case highly authentic - voices of the sufferers.

The five papers that follow address in various forms the issues of representation and of re-presentation, by discussing voices *for*, voices *about* and voices *to*, but rarely voices *of*.

The first two of these consider gender. Beginning with Sam Puleston's paper offering a deliberately provocative perspective of how those who seek to be supportive of the often poor conditions sex workers face, speak for them in ways that diminish their sense of self further. Whilst Megan Sirr's paper takes a more traditional semiotic analytical view of contemporary advertising to demonstrate how women remain objects of desire through the powerful voices of contemporary brands.

The fifth paper in this special edition is co-authored by Lucy Smith and Dr Shelley Thompson, and deals with the representation of youth political engagement. Investigating three perspectives published in the *Guardian* on youth engagement in the lead up to the recent British General Election in May 2015 they argue that young members of the electorate are positioned as disengaged because of a narrow view of what it means to be engaged with politics.

The final two papers address the representation and subsequent marginalizing of mental health through both the media and ubiquitous advertising messages. First Abbey Everett's paper examines what makes mental illness newsworthy and how it is framed in the news. Here, she considers how media represents the issue of mental illness and people who live with mental illness in such narrow ways and with such relentless stock phrases that it clearly helps to perpetuate stereotypes and the resultant stigma surrounding people who live with mental illness. The issue closes with a paper jointly authored by Tom Rickhuss and Dr Richard Scullion, which argues that the advertising industry, through its routines of practice and its self-serving priorities, silences individuals with mental health problems. At best it offers the restrictive voice of large and well established charities seeking to help; thus making the only viable voice in this sphere that of 'worthy cause'.

Collectively, this work calls for greater plurality of voice that does not simply equate a sense of freedom with a consumer voice through market activity. They help to remind us that news media and all forms of commercial and promotional communication has a wider societal purpose; to 'enable voice to matter' (Couldry 2010 p.137).

Dr Richard Scullion and Dr Shelley Thompson
July 2015

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